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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING

IN CHARGE OF

BY L. FOLEY, R.N.

AN EXPERIENCE IN AN ITALIAN HILL TOWN

BY MARY G. FRASER, R.N.

American Red Cross Tuberculosis Commission to Italy

One day when I was assisting the dispensary surgeon with the dressings, a woman came in who had a very bad mastitis,—both breasts were infected. The abscess in one had ruptured spontaneously and the discharge was profuse. The other breast was very much swollen, an abscess there had also ruptured and was bleeding. The doctor placed the patient on the dressing-room table and without any local, much less general, anesthetic, proceeded to cleanse both wounds. With a scalpel he made an incision about three inches below the nipple on each side, used a solution which he poured into the wound, then inserted his gloved finger and cleaned out as much of the pus as he could. In the meanwhile I held the woman's arms over her head. She looked frightened, but did not utter a word. Finally, when the physician finished dressing both breasts and had her sit up, I glanced at her face and noticed that she was deathly pale. I looked at the physician and he seemed, then, to appreciate my horror at the woman's condition.

He immediately ordered some cognac. I gave the woman a glass of this and told her to go home and to bed, promising to call to see her that evening. This instruction was given at my own discretion, the physician seemingly deeming it unnecessary. I called at the home about eight o'clock that night and found her in bed. She and her husband lived in one small room, very bare of furniture. The bed was comfortable and, of course, clean, with most elaborately embroidered sheets. As the room was very dark, on account of there being only one small window, I could not do very much for her. I took her temperature and while doing this I noticed her husband lying at the foot of the bed. Upon inquiry, she informed me that he had *la febbre*.

I happened to have an American thermometer which registers to 107 degrees. After taking the wife's temperature, which was 102, I washed my thermometer in cold water, as there was nothing else, not even soap, in the house, and took the husband's temperature. The mercury went past the 107 mark, so I am unable to state just what the man's temperature could have been. The pulse was 100.

Greatly worried, I hastened out to hunt up one of the village doctors, of whom there were five in town. I could not find one. In fact, the whole village hunted with me for them, but we could not get a doctor, so I called at the drug store. I inquired of the woman druggist just what procedure they took, as I had come to the conclusion that the diagnosis of the village people was correct and the man was suffering from malaria. She told me that they usually gave quinine in three or four doses, followed by a purgative. I considered this a legitimate emergency and felt so worried about the man that I thought I had better provide him with the usual prescription. So I took the quinine and purgative to him and told him to take both.

Next morning I called to see my two patients and found that the man had gone to work with his mules at 6 o'clock. I have never been able to see him since, as he is always working, so I cannot state just how his temperature has been running. With much difficulty, I persuaded his wife to remain in bed for two days. After that, she came quite regularly to the dispensary and made an uneventful recovery. I saw her two months afterwards. She was well and happy. One breast was destroyed, but she was nursing the baby from the other and it seemed to give her no trouble. This was her first pregnancy and was the only case of mastitis that I have seen in four months' time.

(Miss Foley writes us from Rome under date of July 17, "the June JOURNAL has just come and it is so nice to have it. Why, oh why, can't we have many more articles like that on page 679, 'Preparation of a Lesson Plan'?" How to make a patient comfortable seems to be the last topic considered in many hospitals and should be the first. This is a subject which we invite senior nurses to write upon for publication in this magazine.) Editor-in-Chief.